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ABSTRACT

Formal structures of higher education that evolved in Islamic culture are discussed, along with parallels to the rise of universities in Medieval Europe. Both Islamic communities and Western Christianity founded colleges through endowments. The structural form of higher education in Islamic education in Islamic regions developed from the efforts of the schools to educate students in a particular world view. A dedication and loyalty of students to one professor and his approach to the subject matter distinguished the Islamic college from its Latin counterpart. In Medieval Europe, the college supported several professors and a number of students bound together largely by a mutually shared dedication to a religious rule. In the Latin West, colleges drew support not from a single patron, but from a great number of benefactors. Islam offered no means of incorporation that would allow a group to ban together as a legal identity so that it could replenish funds or add to the original endowment. Islamic higher learning institutions have continued to emphasize religious sciences, mainly jurisprudence, and exclude the advanced knowledge in the sciences and social sciences. Twenty references are cited. (SW)

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THE EMERGENCE OF THE COLLEGIATE SYSTEM IN CLASSICAL ISLAM: 700-1200 AD

A Paper presented by

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ASHE Annual Meeting

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THE EMERGENCE OF THE COLLEGIATE SYSTEM IN CLASSICAL ISLAM: 700-1200 AD

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The West has long recognized the importance of the transference of knowledge from Islamic lands during the Middle Ages and its catalytic effect on scholarship and the rise of Medieval Universities. While not known popularly, research and publication of this momentous undertaking substantiates the role of Islam as a bridge between the Hellenistic world and Medieval Christian society. The major centers of translation existed in Islamic colleges in Spain and Sicily. During the eleventh and twelvth centuriees a great flood of Greek and Arabic scientific and philosophic commentaries entered the European community in Latin translation. Our knowledge of Plato, Aristotle, Galen Hypocrates, Euclid, Archemedies, Ptolomy and others derive from these transcriptions. This accumulated treasure emanated from informal structures of the higher learning as they spontaneously appeared in Islamic society, through scholars affiliated with palace schools, libraries, hospitals, and observatories.

The formal structures of higher learning in Islam, the mosque-colleges and madrassahs, however, are not perceived

by Western scholars as progenitors of the institutions of higher learning that emerged in Europe several centuries later. These formal structures dominated higher education throughout Islamic lands and served as alma mater to great numbers of students and faculty. Their impact on the West appears muted, yet Latin schoolmen, the recepients of Islamic scholarship, could not have totally ignored them, Information of them would have come not only through the translated manuscripts themselves but also through the transcribers who had first hand experience of them. Seemingly the infusion of the more formalized aspects of Islamic higher education into our heritage has a missing link, but research by Arabic speaking scholars in recent years suggests that such a nexus does indeed exist.[1] They contend that a transference of instructional methodology and even some organizational forms from Islamdom to the Latin West did tale place during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The argument supporting the influence on the instructional methodology of the Medieval University, scholasticism, was presenteed in a paper at this conference last year. My intent this year is to illuminate the other aspect of the issue, that which relates to formal structures of higher education as they evolved in Islamic culture and to draw parallels to the rise of Universities in Medieval Europe, or more specifically to focus on the emergence of the collegiate system within them.

Despite similarities in structure and function and the presence of formal institutions of higher education in Islamdom that predate the Medieval University, one could contend that such structures arose spontaneously from similar circumstances in both societies, evolving a pattern common to both in meeting the educational needs of a faith dominated environment.

Both Islamic communities and Western Christianity founded colleges through the aegis of endowments. The principles of endowment that supported higher education in the Latin West, however, differed from those proscribed by Islamic Law. Wealthy pastrons in Europe donated assets to religious communities to provide room and board for masters and novices. Such structures, labeled colleges, while housing students and faculty originally did not constitute a formal part of the University, or more acurately, studium generale. An endowment granted to a religious community constituted a gift to the Church to pursue its missions and was merged with its total assets. Further, colleges initially did not influence the instructional program of the university, thus endowing a college could have no impact on curriculum or instruction. These functions remained tightly controlled by the masters' guild.

A similar restriction did not apply under Islamic law.[2] Waqf, the legal procedure governing endowment, acted as a means to support education and still preserve a benefactor's

assets, while allowing him a certain measure of control over its use. Through waqf the endower could dictate the qualifications for the staff in the institution founded and also the theological and political assumptions underlying the curriculum. The donor could appoint himself or a close associate the trustee and even profide for the continuance of the institution by dictating the method by which new trustees would be appointed after his death--these could include members of his family.

Wealthy Muslims empoyed waqf to support a limited, or neighborhood mosque, called a masjid. These religious structures provided smaller groups of Muslims a place where their particular sect withing traditional Islam cjould djominate the religious observances, but most particularly to further its educational mission. Islam did not develop theology as a major intellectual tradition, the principles of the faith having been wholly defined from the Quran, the literal Word of God. Islamic religious leaders and scholars devoted their energies to elaborating a code of law and a trtadition of right behavior to guide the faithful in living out the revelation through Mohammed in a practical world. Four major interpretations of the law evolved in the early centuries of Islam. Each had its founding patriarch; each had its disciples and adherents. The structural form of higher education in Islamic regions developed from the

efforts of the schools of law to educate young men in their particular world view.

Such mosque-colleges, appeared as early as the 8th century and consistently dominated the educational scene during the Classical Age. Although most closely associated with legal education and jurisprudence, a few masjids did specialize in the study of the purely religious sciences, the Quran, traditions, and preaching. Like the larger congregationsl mosques, the masjid was a place of worship and included among its limited staff an imam (prayer leader) and muezzin (prayer caller), in addition to the professor (shaikh) and his assistants. The positions of shaikh and imam could be combined in the same person, and often were as a matter of economy. More accurately an instructor of law was called a mudarris, and that title most commonly designated the leader of the mosque-college. By tradition the masjid employed only one shaikh who set the curriculum and the tone of instruction. The institution became a manifestation of the man himself; students identified with him and his interpretation of the subject matter. He exercized nearly total control over his students and tended to treat them in a fatherly manner, truly an example of <u>in loco parentis</u>. Attendance at the mosque-college was by invitation of the shaikh, following a formal request from a young man to join the study circle. Limited enrollment

insured a personalized, in not individualized, form of education.

Appointment of the leader of the masjid occured in several ways. Theoretically the Caliph or his designate had the power to appoint all positions connected with a mosque. As a practical matter this did not happen in the case of the smaller, neighborhood mosques. Local officials and respected religious leaders performed this function with the approval of the qadi, the local magistrate. If the masjid was founded and supported by a specific sect to meet its needs, the members of that sect engaged a mudarris representative of their religious views. In the case of a mosque college supported through an endowment, the terms of the endowment, called a waqf, generally stated the manner in which the leader should be appointed. The donor of the endowment ordinarily stated the qualifications of the shaikh with regard to what school of law in professed. The benefactor may even have a specific individual in mind in setting up the masjid. In both instances, the qadi would review the appointment and, perhaps, consult with local religious leaders to assure himself that the designated person was appropriate for the position.

Those other positions of a study circle (halqua) housed in the masjid, in addition to the shaikh, included an imam to lead the prayers of the congregation and to preach at the Friday Sermon. The Friday Sermon, in this circumstance

called a waz, could be delivered in any mosque, as distinguished from the khutba, the Friday sermon that could be proclaimed only in a congregational mosque as designated by the civil authority.

Where finances permitted, the masjid expanded its staff by employing associate instructors, repeaters, and tutors. The associate instructor (naib) substituted for the mudarris if the latter were occupied with other matters connected with the administration of the mosque-college. The repeater (muid) was trusted with repeating the lectures to students who could not hear them or were absent from the session and also gave private help to students having difficulty with their studies. The tutor (mufid) assisted younger or less advanced students but was not yet judged capable of repeating the lecture.

With the legal concept of <u>waqf</u> accepted widely by wealthy patrons who endowed mosque-colleges throughout Islamdom, the elements coalesced for an important transition of higher learning in Islamic culture that would create more formal, structured institutions of higher learning. In the 10th century, Badr ibn Hasanawaih al-Kurdi (d. 1015), a wealthy nobleman, accepted the governorship over several provinces that had been ruled by his father. His reputation as a philathropist was legendary, particularly his patronage of educational institutions.[3] He supported scholars as well as pilgrims on their way to Mecca. He established a number

of mosque colleges. In doing so he added another element to the college--that of residential living. Badr established throughout his area of administration 3,000 mosque colleges to with an inn was attached, a masjid-khan.[4] The term "khan" may be translated "as an inn; a caravanserai; a place in which travellers lodge", but in this combination, it referred to a residence hall for law students who had come from distant villages. We have a description of this situation by a student who had come to Baghdad to study Shafii law in a mosque-college with a residential facility. This is how abu Ali al-Fariqi describes it: "I took up residence in an inn adjacent to the mosque college of abu Ishaq in the quarter of Bab al-Maratib wherein resided the fellows of the Sheikh and the scholars studying under his direction."[5]

The practice of providing living arrangements which brought together students and instructors in the same building continued throughout the history of higher education in both the East and the West as a facilitative structure because it promoted an atmosphere in which learning could be emphasized and reinforced through the living situation and the great advantage of total emergence in a scholarly life. Badr used the terms of <u>waqf</u> to create these institutions and to make certain stipulations guarranteeing that monies from the endowment should support living arrangements for students. Since masjid-khans fell

under the rubric of mosques, the line of succession of the leader came under the prerogative of the Caliph or his deputy.

The next step in the evolutionary process of institutions of higher learning in Islamic society occurred under the patronage of the Vizir Nizam al-Mulk around the year 1064. The structure established by the Vizir called a madrassah, was modelled after the masjid-khan and took a form that would be recognized as a college in much the same way as that term is used in the West today.[6] By this time the Saljuq Turks had usurped the civil authority from the Abbasid Calinhate in the Middle East. Originating in Central Asia, they migrated West converting to Islam en route. Before invading Baghdad, the Saljuq leaders agreed not to displace the Caliph as the religious soverign of Islam, but to create a political administration under the authority of one of thier own who would take the title of Sultan. Nizam al-Mulk was a powerful vizir, or prime minister of the Sultan, and, in securing his power within the realm, endowed hundreds of law schools of the Shafiite school of law.

The Islamic doctrinal movement behind the Shafiite school of law, known as Asharism, attempted to synthesize elements of both the liberal and conservative approach to Quranic law and to incorporate both reason and faith as a balanced means of interpreting the law.[7] As a new movement in Islam, it rejected the extremes of other factions and

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took a middle road on religious questions. As such, Asharism was opposed by those of extreme views on both sides. Nizam al-Mulk, by endowing institutions through the law of waqf, introduced Asharite views and championed Shafiite colleges throughout his realm. Although religiously oriented, the madrassah was not an official mosque, thus Nizam al-Mulk, by endowing such independent institutions, assured that he would retain control over the curriculum and appointments, even to providing for a succession not under the control of the Caliph --a clever political move, with great impact on higher education. By not attaching the residence hall to an official mosque he freed the institution from direct religious control, albeit still within the mainstream of the faith-oriented Islamic society. The madrassah indeed evinced the unique nature of a private institution of higher education.

Each madrassah incorporated a library within its structure. While libraries had long existed in the palaces and homes of the nobility and the wealthy, they rarely formed an integral part of a mosque-college." In making manuscripts available to students, the madrassah borrowed a practice from study circles of the rationalistic movement that had gained intellectual insights from Hellenistic culture and initially had flourished under Abbasid rule. The availability of a variety of works, beyond that which comprised the text for instruction, greatly enhanced the

learning experience of students by exposing them to several points of view as well as to writings beyond that of immediate concern in the lectures.

In establishing the madrassah the Vizir Nizam al-Mulk provided an endowment to support a mudarris, a prayer leader (imam), and also the students who were supported through stipends as well as room and board. The accrual of these benefits to students constituted a major distinction between the madrassah and the mosque-college and meant the former became an attractive institution for less well-to-do students. In this we have the origination of the residential colleges for impecunious scholars, that later took root in the Medieval West at Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge.

Though colleges in both regions created a living-learning environment for students, some important distinctions between the two forms shed light on the ultimate destities of the institutions. In Islamic regions, the college endured as a self-contained structure, sustaining only one professor who governed the curriculum and the academic lives of his students and assistants. A dedication and loyalty of students to the one master and his approach to the subject matter distinguished the Islamic college from the more collaborative atmosphere of it Latin counterpart.

In Medieval Europe the college, while constituting a residence hall, supported a several masters and a number of students, bound together not so much by the relationship between the two groups but by a mutually shared didication to a religious rule. Coleges in Europe took their model from the monastic system as it had evolved in early Christianity and continued into the Medieval period. Initially no instruction took place in European colleges; students and masters performed their scholarly activities in the context of the university guild and its structures. Only in subsequent centuries, and primarily at Oxford and Cambridge, did colleges offer instruction within their confines.

The religious orders that founded colleges differed from their monastic colleagues in that they depended upon donations from the public for survival. Unlike traditional religious groups they did not own lands which provided their sustenance. Thus, a close link emerged between the founding of the mendicant orders, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, and the appearance of colleges. Endowments awarded to these new religious communities supported their educational mission. In the Latin West colleges drew support, not from a single patron, but from a great number of benefactors. The administration of the endowed funds was a collegial function of the religious order involved.

From a structural perspective, while waqf facilitated the establishment of religiously oriented institutions of higher learning, Islam offered no means of incorporation which would allow a group to band together as a legal identity so that it could perpetuate itself by replenishing funds or adding to the original endowment. Islamic law did not permit the legal fiction of incorporation which existed in the West. The document establishing waqf dictated by the donor could not be altered to meet contingencies. Losses could occur because of bad investments; destruction of property in war, fire, or other disasters; or the incompetence of the trustees. Any of these could deplete the original endowment, causing the dissolution of the institution. The conditions for the granting of an endowment under Islamic law encouraged small, ideologically othodox, family dominated insitutitons of higher learning. Few such structures surviveed the life of their patrons or immediate heirs.

Despite common roots for both Islamic and European education in Greek classicism and the methodology of scholasticism, Islamic institutions of higher learning have altered little since the 12th century, choosing to continue in their dedication to the religious sciences, mainly jurisprudence, and excluding the advanced knowledge in the sciences and social sciences that has developed through the efforts of scholars in Western Europe and the Americas. What halted the progress of Islamic institutions

of higher learning that had enjoyed several centuries of growth and development and a fruitful existence? Why did they ignore the great strides occurring in knowledge and the development of universities in Europe during this same period? Some of the reasons lie in its structure and function and certainly forces in society also played a part. The combination of these two predicted the outcome as it occurred in Islamic countries.

Madrassahs and mosque-colleges lacked a device for continuing their structure and function over an extended period of time. As discussed, they did not develop the guild as a corporate entity that could raise the necessary money for their continuance and provide a method for assuring the perpetuation of the structure. In Europe, the resources of the college and the university lay in the hands of a collective, the masters, who nourished a professional commitment to meeting societal needs, serving knowledge, and perpetuating themselves. In Islam, waqf as a source of funding colleges and madrassahs did not provide for perpetuity beyond the limited means provided in the original document, usually a self-serving contract to protect the assets of a particular family. No means emerged to bring in additional resources or new personnel into the mosque college or the madrassah under this system. The destiny of such institutions resided in the hands of the benefactor as dictated in his writ of waqf and with the shaik who took the responsibility alone for the continuance of the institution.

The lack of a guild or community of scholars worked against the continuation of institutions of higher learning in Islamdom in another, perhaps more crucial, way. Since Islamic scholars worked independently, they did not come together for intellectual stimulation to challenge each other and to raise hypotheses for further investigation. They lacked a collaborative approach to major issues within the society and did not build upon each other as readily as they could had they combined themselves into a community of scholars. In isolation, the master of a mosque-college or madrassah simply was not challenged by his colleagues to pursue scholarship in any different direction than he had learned from his own master.

According to Makdisi, the schools of law began to stagnate when the civil authorities provided a paid mufti to provide fatwas, that is, legal opinions, for the public.[9] This had the effect of taking that function with its remunerative aspect away from scholars of the law. He argues that without the stimulation of deriving legal opinions on a continuing basis, legal scholars lost their incentive and motivation to pusue scholarship in jurisprudence.

With regard to intellectual advancement, in the Latin West, the restrictive nature of scholasticism as the method of scholarship accomplished the same stagnating condition. Despite declining enrollment during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Medieval Universities survied because of their organizational structure. Their endowments endured, benefactions

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continued to sell their assets, the monastic system provided a means for selecting continuing leadership and affirming authority. The transformed institutions of the Medieval University still persist in their mission to instruct young people and expand knowledge.

Islamic institutions of higher learning remained static and exist today much as they did centuries ago, honoring a personalized instructional style and continuing an intellectual tradition from a bygone age. To meet the needs of a technological society, governments in Islamic countries allowed the Western model of higher education to devlop parallel structures alongside traditional madrassahs. Often, the result have led to an ambivolent approach to knowledge. Young Muslims learn Western technology for its practical value but are encouraged by tradition and early learning to reject its scientific roots and its grounding in Western philosophy.[10] Attempts to modernize learning in Islamic countires have led to confusion, rebellion, and civil strife.

It strikes me that the more we in Western society understand and appreciate the traditions of learning and the values of Islamic culture, the more hope we all have of achieving a peaceful settlement of strife in the Middle East, particularly, but in other Islamic regions as well. We, as American educators, ought to take our commitment to the global village seriously and promote greater understanding and respect for the traditions of learning that exist throughout the Islamic world.

Scholars from both cultures share a common heritage in Hellenism. There is much in our respective cultural backgrounds that binds us around common educational goals.

END NOTES

[1]See George Makdisi, The Rise of Colleges (Edinburgh University Press, 1981); Mehdi Nakosteen, History of Islamic Origins of Western Education (Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 1964).

[2]For a thorough treatment of the law of waqf, see Makdisi, Chapter III, pp. 35-74.

[3]See George Makdisi, "On the Origin and Development of the College in Islam and the West," in Islam and the Medieval West, ed. Khalil I. Semaan (Albany: SUNY Press, 1980), pp. 32-33.

[4]Ibid., p. 35.

[5]Ibid., p. 34.

[6]Makdisi, The Rise, pp. 27-28.

[7]George Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh-Century Baghdad," Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 24 (1961): 2-55, pp. 1-3; 50-52.

[8]George Makdisi, "Law and Traditionalism in the Institutions of Learning of Medieval Islam," in Theology and Law in Islam, ed. G.E. von Grunebaum, (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 19__), p. 83.

[9]Makdisi, The Rise, p. 291.

[10]Fazlur Rahman, Islam and Modernity (The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 46.

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